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ABSTRACT

The intention in the creation and publication of a journal, "Issues in Education," at Towson State University (Maryland) was to offer an alternative to the traditional seminar paper for graduate students in elementary education and reading. The goal was to have seminar students feel that the product of their library research was valuable and of interest to colleagues and that there was a clear connection between course work and classroom experiences. The seminar courses used a writer's workshop model, with students forming peer response groups to help each other prepare preliminary and final drafts. The journal has provided graduate students with a way to demonstrate for a broader audience the issues of particular interest to them, their scholarly investigation of those issues, and their practical application in their own careers. The graduate students felt that the effort they put into their research would be acknowledged and respected. The titles of the papers printed in the first four issues of the journal are listed in an appendix. (JDD)

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Publication of a Graduate Seminar Journal: Connecting Students and Content

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Publication of a Graduate Seminar Journal:
Connecting Students and Content

Introduction

The seminar courses in Elementary Education and Reading come at the end of the M.ED. programs. They are intended as capstone courses in which students investigate issues of particular interest to them. Although this is the intent, students have often regarded this assignment as an extended ordeal in the library, tapping into the vast array of data bases now available to researchers. They have regarded it as an academic exercise, only marginally related to their classrooms and classroom concerns.

Our intention in the creation and publication of a journal, Issues in Education, was to offer an alternative to the traditional seminar paper. We wanted students to feel that what they had to say, the product of their library "ordeal," was valuable and of interest to their colleagues in the field, that their research would not simply be filed away and only occasionally trotted out as examples of how to do reference citations and bibliographies. We also wanted students to realize that there was a clear connection between the content of their course work and what they did in the classroom. We encouraged them early in their programs to begin to think about the application of theory - the content of their course texts and readings - in their own schools and classrooms. In the Seminar courses, we encouraged them to consider concerns or issues of particular interest to them through a review of the relevant research or by doing a piece of action research.

Implementation

In our first semester, the two seminar courses, ELED 775 Seminar in Elementary Education and EDUC 729 Seminar in Reading both had low enrollment. This provided us with the opportunity to work more cooperatively. The seminars met on a quasi-independent study basis individually and also collectively as one class. Essentially, we team taught the two seminars together. While there were two separate course outlines and supplementary materials for each course, we coordinated our calendars and activities so that we could meet together when appropriate.

We employed a Writer's Workshop model with the students working in small groups of 2 or 3. The peer response groups would meet periodically to help each other prepare their preliminary and final drafts. Students were given a previous edition of the Journal, which served as a model for their writing. They also received copies of a number of references to help them (Many of these references are listed in the reference section of this paper). We wanted the students to feel free to be candid in their role as peer reviewers, so we elected to use a contract grading system. This eliminated the students' concern about their involvement in evaluating each other's writing.

At the end of the semester, the students turned in paper and disk copies of their journal articles for further editing. The students chose a professor from the College of Education and an administrator from one of the metropolitan area school systems to

write their reflections on the articles in the Journal. Funding for the preparation and printing of the Journal was underwritten by the Dean of the College of Education and the printing of the Journal was done on campus to cut costs. One student remained on the project and served as a technical editor and received independent study credit for her assistance.

Since that initial semester, we have published five journals. Larger enrollments have precluded our combining our seminars, so that over time the two courses have taken on somewhat different structures and styles. The Seminar in Reading, for example, has had to make writing the journal article a selective process. Currently, a few students are invited to edit their seminar papers for inclusion in the journal.

Some Observations

Our graduate students liked the idea of a journal. They were excited about being published. They immediately felt that the effort they put into their research would be acknowledged and respected. They also believed that they could spend their time investigating issues that were of genuine concern to them. Their selection of issues and the articles they wrote give testimony to this (See Appendix for Journal Tables of Content.) It seems to us that our graduate students have responded thoughtfully to their daily concerns in the schoolhouse. Working together, they have gained a perspective about their work as educators. Often times

working in isolation and going unrecognized for their efforts, they have discovered in these seminars through sharing their concerns in their articles that they are not alone, that their concerns are indeed the current issues of our profession. Reading strategies, grouping, cooperative learning, classroom management, outcome-based education, for example, all figure prominently in the journals that have been published to date.

In the following pages are a few observations from some of our students who have contributed their expertise to this journal project. Jill Bender was concerned with her new role as a special education resource teacher. She talked about her mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension in her article. She was both excited and apprehensive:

> I started by attending an inservice workshop. . . where I discovered that. . . at least I was not alone. It all sounded so wonderful. This was just what my students needed! I was to find out, however, that putting the ideas and principles of the resource room into practice was very difficult and was something that would take more time than I had realized.

Jill went to the literature to find research that might help her deal with the transition she and many special educators are making.

Kathleen Frechette took a year's leave of absence to complete her M.Ed. in Reading. She had come to believe that her Writing Workshop, of which she and her students "felt so proud", was not perfect. She felt that she had not demonstrated her own use of the writing process, that, in fact, she did not feel comfortable with her own writing. She examined this concern in her article:

> I began to wonder if there were other teachers out there, like me, who were not comfortable with their own writing . . . I felt it was important to review the theoretical intent of Writing Workshop. I wanted to observe and talk to teachers who used writing workshop.

Kathleen's concerns and curiosity evolved into a piece of action research which was not only published in our Issues in Education journal, but was the cover story in the Maryland Writing Project newsletter.

Teri Salmons, an elementary teacher, became quite interested in the construct of multiple intelligences. She had a desire to deal with a recurrent concern with such abstract theory -could it really be translated into practical curricula? She elected to design a literature unit based on the multiple intelligence of her own students. Her action research and examination of the literature, both documented in her article, convinced her that "by fostering. . . a variety of talents or intelligences, it would seem likely that more students would be able to develop their unique profiles and find success in the school setting."

Not all the seminar students develop areas for investigation through their classroom or their coursework. Patricia Mathewson's area for investigation grew out of conversations with fellow students. Her growing concern was that things in reading education had changed considerably, if not decisively, in the twenty years she had taken off to raise a family. She chose to review the literature and to interview a reading supervisor, a principal, and a reading specialist to get both the research and real world

perspectives on the changing role of the reading specialist. In her article, she concludes:

> what I observed reflects much of my findings in the literature. The reading specialist I observed does spend time in remedial instruction with groups of students. However, she also fulfills the role of resource person or advisor through her in-class lessons, inservice programs, and interaction with teachers. I believe. . . that this combination of roles is essential to the success of a school's reading program. After being out of the classroom for many years, I feel reassured knowing there is an advisor I could rely on. . .

Conclusions and Implications

The journal has done what we have hoped. It provides our graduate students with a way to demonstrate for a broader audience the areas of particular interest to them, their scholarly investigation of those issues, and their practical application in their own careers.

One student wrote the following at the conclusion of one semester:

> It was a positive experience and I am delighted with the chance to have my efforts published. To me, this option really appears to put theory into practice. We encourage our students to become involved in the writing process and celebrate their writings. It seems a logical progression to allow and encourage graduate students to do the same.

Her observations crystallize nicely what we think we are trying to do with our graduate students. Unlike a thesis or a seminar paper, the journal article option gives our students an audience and makes their work more real. Having been through the process of writing an article, we hope that some of our students will continue writing

for possible publication. We think understanding the draft process in writing gives our students insight into what is involved in having any piece of writing published. Our project, then, has been, we think, innovative and student centered. This innovation has proven to be an exciting way in which to bring closure for our students at the end of their graduate programs. The creation of a journal may help to ensure the ongoing participation of these students in their profession after leaving the university campus and their graduate studies.

We have now published 5 journals. Our students clearly believe this innovation is worthwhile. So do some of our colleagues. One professor has adopted the journal as a text for his undergraduate student teachers. They find it particularly helpful because it provides the insights of teachers "on the front lines" about issues in education that concern them.

We have thought about developing a Graduate Symposium where seminar students could share their research with a broader audience of college faculty and graduate students. We have also discussed the idea of making the journal more representative of the whole College of Education, but to date coordinators of other graduate programs have not responded to the idea.

The journal is an idea that we have enthusiastically embraced. We are, however, beginning to realize that more support of the journal is needed for it to continue. Assigned time for the instructors who edit and publish it, secretarial support and

regular financial underwriting are vital to making Issues in Education a permanent part of the graduate experience at Towson State University. The journal gives the graduate experience a voice. It has served to connect graduate students with each other as well as some of the undergraduates who follow. It has also served to connect the College of Education with the various schools, public or private, that it serves. In sum, the journal has been a worthwhile enterprise and should continue.

Appendix

VOLUME I **TABLE OF CONTENTS** **FALL 1991**

Reaching for the World: Children's Literature

Literature Makes Your Room Come Alive

Whole Language vs Basal: Why Not the Best of Both?

Readability and Reading Ability:
What Does One Have to Do With the Other?

Ability-Grouping: What is Best for Today's Students?

Spread the Word:
Don't Teach Grammar and Mechanics - Teach Writing

Foreign Language in the Elementary School:
A Primary Goal

Retention: Does It Help or Hinder?

Success For All: A Proven Success

Coping With the Death of a School Teacher

Conflict Resolution: A Mediation Program

VOLUME 1 **TABLE OF CONTENTS** **SPRING, 1992**

The Role of the Teacher in the 90's

Reflections of a First Year Resource Teacher

The Reading Specialist: A Look at Possible Roles

Literature Units for All Intelligences

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Writing Workshop: The Teacher as a Writer -
How Important Is It?

A Teacher Learns about Critical Thinking

Grouping in the Middle School:
What Do Teachers Think?

VOLUME 2 **TABLE OF CONTENTS** **FALL, 1992**

Single Parent Family vs. Traditional Family:
Are Teachers' Perceptions Influenced by Family Style?

Should Beginning Teachers Have Mentors?

Cooperative Learning in a Changing World

Preschool Reading Experiences and Their Effect
on Later Reading Success

Instruction in Derivational Morphology Will
Improve Spelling Ability in Children

Computers as an Instructional Tool in the Classroom:
Teacher Concern over Implementation

Should Children Be Retained?

The Achievement Gap: A Problem with a Quick Fix

Ability Grouping: Pros, Cons, and Alternatives

Is Mainstreaming Beneficial?

VOLUME 2 **TABLE OF CONTENTS** **SPRING, 1993**

Educational Excellence: Funding Public Education

Outcome-Based Education

Teacher's Perceptions of Outcome-Based Education

Portfolio Assessment:
How Do Classroom Teachers View this Approach?

Writing Portfolios and Self-Assessment to Develop Quality Writing

Can Student-Selected Reading Materials
Improve Reading and Writing Skills?

Phonemic Awareness and Reading Achievement

The Effects of Cooperative Learning
on Student Mathematics Achievement

The Social Acceptance of Learning Disabled Children:
A New Look at an Old Problem

Peace on the Playground: The Role of Intervention
in Controlling Aggression in Young Children

We Still Need Minority Teachers
Year-Round Education: An Enhancement to the System

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